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ABSTRACT

In 1991, a study was conducted at Golden West College (California) to determine whether there was a significant relationship between eligibility for English 100, a university-transferable writing course, and success in Introductory Psychology. The sample consisted of students appearing on first-day rosters of Introductory Psychology classes in the fall 1990 semester. The grades of these students were compiled from course grade lists, and data on assessment test scores and previous experience with English writing courses were obtained from student records. Of the 349 students in the sample, 164 (47%) were eligible for English 100, while 185 (53%) were not. Overall, slightly less than half (171 or 48.9%) ultimately completed the course with a passing grade. There was a statistically significant relationship between eligibility for English 100 and the likelihood of passing Psychology 100. The same analysis was conducted for students remaining on the rosters at the fourth week of the semester, thus eliminating those who dropped the course early. Of these 297 students, 137 (46.1%) were eligible for English 100, whereas 161 (53.9%) were not eligible. Of this cohort, 171 (57.4%) eventually passed the course. For this cohort, there was a significant relationship between Psychology 100 outcome and English 100 eligibility status, as well. However, while there was clear evidence of a relationship between the variables, eligibility for English 100 was neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for success in Psychology 100. An appendix provides related data tables and graphs. (JMC)

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GOLDEN WEST COLLEGE
August 1991

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Eligibility for Freshman Composition and Success in Introductory Psychology

Steven Isonio, PhD

Background. A certain minimal level of basic skill is necessary for success in most content courses. In addition to motivation, interest, and effort, success in content courses in all disciplines clearly depends upon the ability to comprehend college level textbooks and to effectively express ideas in writing. At the request of the Psychology Instructional Unit Administrator, a study was undertaken with the intention of assessing the relationship between a primary indicator of attainment of collegiate level English skills (eligibility for English 100) and success in Introductory Psychology (Psychology 100). Thus, the question addressed by the study was: is there a significant relationship between eligibility for English 100, the university transferable writing course, and success (pass/fail) in Introductory Psychology. If there is a significant relationship between these factors, then it might be argued that eligibility for English 100 should be considered as a prerequisite for Introductory Psychology.

The course catalogue description for English 100 notes the following class activities: "composition and revision of essays, critical thinking, critical reading and documentation". The question addressed by this study involves the possible relationship between eligibility for (not successful completion of) Freshman Composition. Introductory Psychology textbooks

typically contain a comprehensive representation of the knowledge base of the discipline. The reading load can be heavy. Also, since there is much specialized terminology, the reading can be difficult. Finally, writing assignments necessitate the ability to express ideas about sophisticated topics in a coherent fashion.

Method. The sample consisted of students from Introductory Psychology classes in the Fall 1990 semester. Specifically, student grades from course grade lists were compiled, and information about assessment test scores and previous experience with English writing courses were obtained from student records. This information was collected for 349 students, approximately 55% of those enrolled during that semester. Based upon these data, students were categorized into four groups that represent the crossing of the two variables under examination. Specifically, students who were eligible for English 100 either passed or did not pass Psychology 100; similarly students not eligible for English 100 either passed or did not pass Introductory Psychology.

Results. Table 1 (Tables and Figures appear in the Appendix) contains the frequencies and percentages for the four categories described above. Of the 349 students on the first day roster in the sample, 164 (47.0%) were eligible for English 100, while 185 (53.0%) were not eligible. Overall, slightly less than half (171, 48.9%) ultimately completed the course with a passing

grade. More pertinent to the research question, there was a statistically significant relationship between eligibility for English 100 and likelihood of passing Psychology 100 [$\chi^2(1) = 5.75$, $p < .05$]. Specifically, English 100 eligible students had a greater pass rate in Psychology 100 than non-eligible students.

Information contained in Table 2 is of the same format as that in Table 1, but in this case, only those students on the fourth week roster are included in the analysis. This approach essentially eliminates those students who dropped the course early (within the first four weeks) often for nonacademic reasons. Of these 297 students, 137 (46.1%) were eligible for English 100, whereas 161 (53.9%) were not eligible. Of this cohort, 171 (57.4%) eventually passed the course. The remaining 127 (42.6%) were not successful. There was a significant relationship between Psychology 100 outcome and English 100 eligibility status [X^2 (1) = 7.98, $p < .01$]. Again, English 100 eligible students had a greater pass rate in Psychology 100 than non-eligible students. Indeed, eligible students were twice as likely to pass than not pass Psychology, whereas non-eligible students were equally likely to pass or not pass.

Summary and Conclusions. The study was undertaken with the intention of determining whether there is a significant difference between the success rates in Introductory Psychology for students who have met the eligibility requirements for English 100 and those students who are not eligible for English 100. A sample of students in the Fall 1990 Introductory Psychology classes was selected and for each student in the sample, English 100 eligibility was determined.

Analyses for students on both first-day and fourth-week rosters showed a trend in the direction of greater success in Introductory Psychology for those students who had me eligibility standards for English 100, the Freshman Composition course. The relationship was particularly striking in the latter case. While there is clear evidence for a relationship between these variables, it should be obvious that it is not a perfect relationship--eligibility for English 100 is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for success in Psychology 100. The question is one the meaning of the increment in likelihood of success in Psychology given English 100 eligibility. The data presented in this report can contribute to an open discussion of the implications of this relationship.

APPENDIX

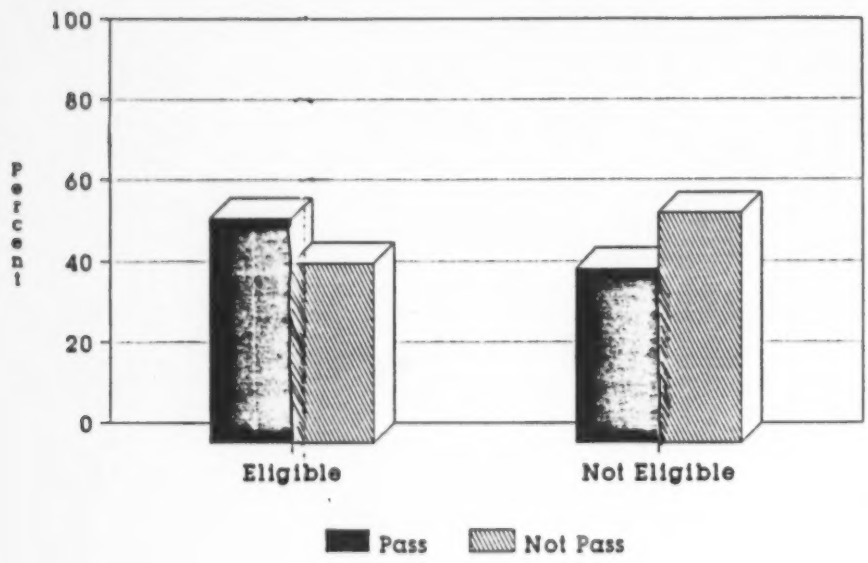
Table 1

Performance in Introductory Psychology as a Function of English 100 Eligibility Status: Students on First-Day Roster

Psychology 100 Outcome	Eligibility for English 100: Eligible	Eligibility for English 100: Not Eligible	
Pass	91 (55.5%)	80 (43.2%)	171
Not Pass	73 (44.5%)	105 (56.8%)	178
	164	185	349

Note. These data include all students on first day rosters. For purposes of this analysis, students who had successfully completed English 10 and/or had scores in the necessary range for recommendation into English 100 were considered eligibility for English 100. Students who earned either an A, B, or C grade passed the class; all others, including those who drop during the first four weeks are among the "not pass" group.

Figure 1. **Pass Rates for Introductory Psychology as a Function of English 100 Eligibility**



(Sample of Fall 1990 Classes--First Day)

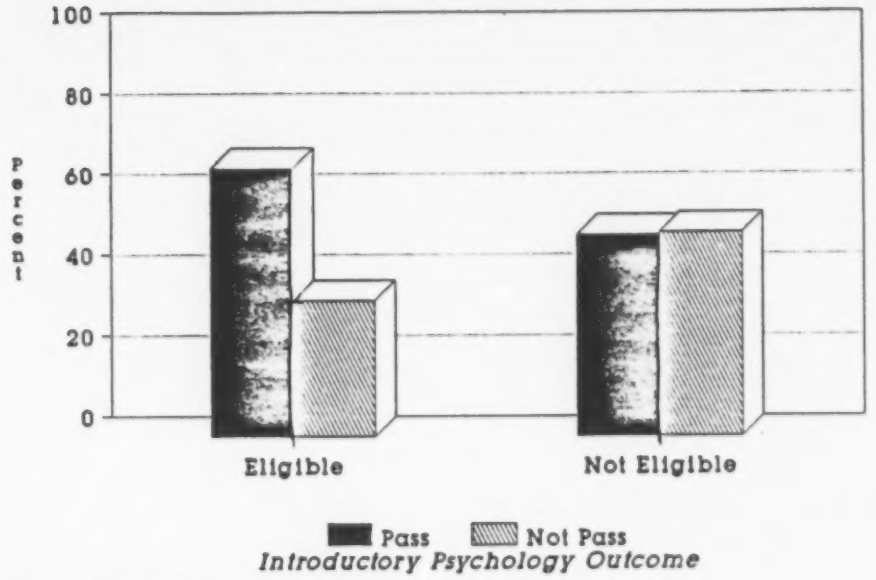
Table 2

Performance in Introductory Psychology as a Function of English 100 Eligibility Status: Students on Fourth-Week Roster

Psychology 100 Outcome	Eligibility for English 100: Eligible	Eligibility for English 100: Not Eligible	
Pass	91 (66.4%)	80 (49.7%)	171
Not Pass	46 (33.6%)	81 (50.3%)	127
	137	161	298

Note. These data include all students on fourth-week rosters. For purposes of this analysis, students who had successfully completed English 10 and/or had scores in the necessary range for recommendation into English 100 were considered eligibility for English 100. Students who earned either an A, B, or C grade passed the class; all others, except those who dropped the course during the first four weeks are included in the "not pass" group.

Figure 2 Pass Rates for Introductory Psychology as a Function of English 100 Eligibility



(Sample of Fall 1990 Classes--Week Four)

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